

At the age of fifteen he was put to clerk in a country store, a career upon which he entered with small taste and enthusiasm. After a short apprenticeship his father set him and his younger brother up in business on their own account. It seems that his brother was as little qualified for the career of a business man as Patrick himself was. The venture soon proved to be a failure. Just after this experience in bankruptcy, when he had attained the age of eighteen, he added to the embarrassment of this distressing situation by marrying. The name of the brave woman who was willing to share his lot of poverty, and who was said to be quite as impecunious as he was, was Sarah Shelton. The situation seemed to call for help from both sides of the family, so accordingly the parents of both parties united in settling the young couple upon a small farm. The experiment at farming was as disastrous as the business venture, and after two years there was a forced sale of whatever remained on the farm. Patrick concluded that perhaps with the added experience of the years at farming, a business venture might prove more successful, and he resolved to again open up a country store. A third failure followed quickly upon the heels of the others.

If one imagines that during all these distressing years Patrick was himself greatly distressed or disturbed, one is much mistaken. It seems that he was possessed of a most perennial good nature, which absolutely refused to be discouraged, and could find no situation, but that out of it some sort of pleasure or satisfaction might be had. However serious the situation might seem to others to be, Patrick never really seemed to be gravely impressed. At the age of twenty-three he was the father of a group of small children, looking to him for daily bread and support, and there was absolutely no visible means of a livelihood, and he was thrown back upon his wife's father, who kept an inn at Hanover Courthouse, for shelter and support.

It is said that his first awakening to consciousness of capacity and to anything like real ambition is due to the preaching of two ministers of the gospel, one of whom, James Waddell, was a blind preacher, and seems to have been able to exercise wonderful influence over great congregations by his eloquence. The other was Samuel Davies, an eminent Presbyterian minister, of whom Patrick Henry said he was the greatest orator that he had ever heard. Under the witchery of the eloquence of these two men he seems really to have found himself. There was that in him which responded to the call for expression aroused in him by the preaching of these two ministers, and for the first time in his life he formed something like a real resolution.

He determined that he would enter at once upon the preparation for the practice of law. It would be interesting to trace through Mr. Henry's ancestry on both sides of the parental house the lines of heredity that would account for his ambition in this respect, and largely for the splendid success realized afterwards in his career. If the accounts are true, he was not by any means the first competent lawyer or successful politician or eloquent speaker in his family. The truth is that up to this time there never had been any appeal made to the man's essential nature, and there was no stir in his life until he felt this call.

The stories concerning his preparation for admission to the bar are somewhat confusing, both as to the length of time taken in this preparation and as to the way in which he was admitted to the practice of law. One story says that he gave only a very few weeks of study, a month or six weeks, in the preparation for admission; another extends the limit to nine months. However this may be, there can be no doubt but that it was with some difficulty that he procured a license. No one knows precisely what conditions were exacted upon which the license was granted. It is said that there were four examiners, Wythe, Pendleton, Peyton Randolph and John Randolph. Wythe and Pendleton, Mr. Jefferson says, at once rejected his application. The two Randolphs were, by his importunity, prevailed upon to sign the license, and having obtained their signatures, he again applied to Pendleton, and after much entreaty and many promises of future study, succeeded also in obtaining his signature. At any rate he obtained his license and began at once to establish himself in his profession. This seems to have been done much more promptly and effectually than many records allow. For misinformation and misunderstanding of Mr. Henry's career as a lawyer, Thomas Jefferson is supposed to be largely responsible. Fortunately, in more recent years certain documents have been brought to light which prove that Mr. Henry was an unusually successful lawyer from the beginning, and that many of the impressions hitherto had concerning his capacity and fitness for the practice of law were entirely erroneous. Mr. Henry's own fee-book, containing a record of the number of suits in which he was employed for the first three years of his professional career, has been found, in which it is indicated that in that time he was engaged in as many as eleven hundred and eighty-five law suits. Furthermore, these documents show that these suits were in the general practice of law,

and not in the main in criminal cases, as is commonly supposed. It was just this sort of practice that required the possession of certain qualities and attributes denied to Mr. Henry, by the general impression. Mr. Moses Coit Tyler institutes a comparison between the accounts of the first several years of Mr. Henry's practice and that of Mr. Jefferson, in which it is indicated very clearly that Mr. Henry's practice for the same time was nearly double that of Mr. Jefferson. Instead of being dependent for these several years upon the bounty of his father-in-law, there is a record of his having advanced to his father-in-law a considerable sum of money. At the beginning, however, such was his general reputation and his manner of dress and speech that it would have taken a very sanguine prophet to predict for him in the practice of law anything but speedy distress and failure.

His first appearance in the courthouse was in the celebrated suit known as "The Parsons' Case." It will be remembered that this was a suit brought by a minister of the Church of England to recover his salary. The salaries of the clergy were to be paid in tobacco at the rate of sixteen thousand pounds per year. On account of the great scarcity of tobacco there had been a large advance in its price. The Virginia Assembly passed an act making all debts payable in tobacco to be paid in money at the rate of only twopence per pound. An appeal was made to the King concerning the legality of this enactment, who promptly decided against it. The clergymen were thus clearly entitled either to the tobacco or to its market price. Mr. Maury, the minister at Hanover, brought suit to recover his salary. There was no question at all as to the law in the case. The King had decided that, and the counsel for the defendants had retired from the case. There seems to have been, however, a universal and earnest desire that some remarks be offered upon the subject, and Patrick Henry was employed to oppose the parsons. It was his first appearance as a lawyer in public speech. At first he was embarrassed and awkward in manner, and slow and stammering in speech. But in some marvelous way a strange transformation took place. He found himself after a few moments in the midst of a most eloquent and passionate utterance. He denounced the clergy in such bold and scathing terms that numbers of them rose up in indignation and left the courthouse. He spoke after the same fashion concerning the King, who had supported the cause of the parsons, and denounced him as a tyrant who had forfeited all right to claim obedience. Even when the counsel for the plaintiff charged that "the gentleman has spoken treason," Henry was by no means quelled or subdued. The truth is, he grew bolder and more violent. The audience was evidently in thorough and manifest sympathy with every extravagant utterance, and when Patrick Henry had closed his marvelous tirade of eloquence, the crowd was in the wildest excitement and commotion as the jury retired to discuss the verdict. Only five minutes passed before the jury returned with a verdict that fixed the damage for the plaintiff at only one penny. The verdict was received with loud and vociferous applause. The will of the King had been openly defied, and when court adjourned the young orator was caught up and carried out on the shoulders of the excited crowd. This was the beginning of his career as a lawyer, and these were the first utterances of the great commoner whose bold speech was to fire the colonial heart throughout the land to defiance and ultimately to open rebellion.

Patrick Henry was elected from Louisa county to the House of Burgesses in 1765. It was at the time when the country was greatly stirred over the act of the English Parliament known as the stamp act. England was greatly embarrassed financially, especially by reason of the debt that had been accumulated incident to the war with France. The Englishmen claimed that as this war had been mainly in the protection of the interest of the American colonies, they should bear a part of the expense. By all the precedents hitherto clearly understood, both in England and America, Virginia could not be taxed except with the consent and authority of the House of Burgesses. The Englishmen considered the conditions extraordinary, and resolved to resort to extreme measures. After some procrastination and debate, a measure was finally passed providing for a stamp upon all documents of a legal nature. This act was received with universal dissent and indignation on the part of the colonists, and it was in the midst of the excitement growing out of the act of the English Parliament that the House of Burgesses met in 1765.

However much the matter may have been discussed in private and personal capacities, no one ventured to secure from the House of Burgesses any formal or official utterance on the subject. Mr. Henry waited until it was within three days of the time agreed upon for the adjournment of the House of Burgesses. He finally and reluctantly determined that he himself would force an expression of opinion from the members of the House of Burgesses. So he prepared and presented five resolutions that were seconded by Mr. Johnson. Mr. Henry was only twenty-nine years of age and was alto-